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ABSTRACT

New York State's rural educational institutions offer opportunities needed by the state but their potentials go unrecognized by educational policymakers. Rural colleges, secondary schools, and Boards of Educational Services (BOCES) are funded at a lower level than urban counterparts at a time when most rural areas are experiencing population increases, employment diversification, and technological change. Universities serving the state's rural areas such as Cornell's statutory land-grant colleges and Cooperative Extension Service are reevaluating their programs' relevance to rural needs. Teachers colleges, agricultural/technical colleges, and community colleges in the State University of New York system and located predominately in rural areas face questions about duplicate missions and programs. Rural public secondary schools demand policy attention to areas such as inadequate tax bases; low scores on minimum competency tests; lack of well-trained mathematics, English, and language teachers; more first-year teachers; and lack of opportunities to study advanced courses. BOCES, which coordinate shared services for rural schools, have cut programs and face criticism for not keeping pace with vocational education needs. Issues for rural education policymakers include institutional mission, governance/management, and financing. The paper concludes with 11 questions elaborating policy issues. (LFL)

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EDUCATION: Challenges Facing Policymakers in the 1980's

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INTRODUCTION

Three trends have put education back on national and state agendas: a rising concern over the ability of the United States economy to compete successfully in a sophisticated, post-industrial information society; massive structural changes (and persistent unemployment) taking place in national, state, and local economies; and a renewed emphasis on equality of opportunity. They present a monumental challenge to everyone concerned with the quality and nature of educational opportunity in all our institutions.

The New York State Legislative Commission on Rural Resources has invited us to direct our thinking to secondary, post-secondary, and university educational resources in rural areas of the state. We have been asked to identify and discuss challenges and opportunities confronting educational policy makers.

The rural populace has traditionally lagged in income and in educational services behind people living in more densely populated areas. The current deficiency of educational resources at rural colleges, secondary schools, or BOCES programs relative to their urban counterparts is clearly demonstrated by all available evidence. The incontrovertible fact is that rural educational institutions have been funded at a lower level than those elsewhere. This old issue of inequities in state and local funding emerges with new urgency in rural New York, where a strained tax base combines with declining enrollments and increased competition for pared state, local, and federal dollars. Educational budgets in institutions struggling to remain contemporary are sorely pinched.

This state of affairs comes on the heels of a decade of inflation, dampened fiscal support, and public apathy which resulted in a sluggish educational environment. State lawmakers, private interests, and educational leaders continue to face these constraints, despite the recent public uproar over quality of education.

Rural New York is in the midst of a structural transition actuated by social, political, economic, and demographic trends. New York State's economy must adapt to these new realities in order to prosper in coming years. Some patterns represent a serious threat to economic and social well-being, while others offer real hope and opportunity for constructive change.

The United States Census Bureau projects that by the year 2000 New York State will lose an additional 2.6 million people, and will move from the second to fourth most populous state. However, during the 1970s, most rural counties in the state experienced population increases at a time when most urban counties declined and contributed to our overall state loss. Still, the effect has been uneven among our rural counties. Some have grown more than others. Some have experienced a large increase in young families, while others have found the number of retirees has increased substantially. In the economic realm, the pace of industrial decentralization, diversification in rural employment opportunities, and technological change has quickened in many rural counties. But here, too, the impacts vary among the rural counties. The list of new patterns being brought about by our turbulent age could easily be expanded.

As we search for the educational mix that best prepares the work force and citizens of the present and future, our teaching and research institutions take on a broader role in advancing the economic vitality of the state and its rural regions. The importance of public and private cooperative arrangements at the state and local levels in meeting our educational needs cannot be over-emphasized. We have already witnessed the initiation of several ties between businesses, colleges, and school systems, and in the near future we can expect these to grow closer and much more common. These initiatives serve to improve the quality of educational opportunity for all, and to alter its context to conform to the needs and expectations of the emerging post-industrial society. The price will be increased efforts at state and local levels to steer funds,

structures, and programs into education that may break with traditional systems. These efforts to achieve educational improvements and cost-effectiveness come from local school districts, post-secondary, and university systems functioning on their own behalf, and not as a result of external pressures or edicts.

EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS: A DOMINANT FORCE IN RURAL NEW YORK'S DEVELOPMENT

Educational institutions have been a dominant force in rural New York's development. The current status of these institutions is reviewed in this section by examining the secondary, post-secondary, and university levels.

Universities

The state's rural areas have been served by the land-grant university at Cornell with passage of the Morrill Act in 1862. Its units include the statutory Colleges of Agriculture and Life Sciences, Human Ecology, and Veterinary Medicine. The majority of students served by these colleges had rural farm backgrounds. Most of the graduates returned to serve their communities by providing technical expertise and innovative ideas. This pattern was fully in keeping with the mission of the land-grant colleges as envisioned by the Act. Since then, rural New York has changed radically in the complexity of its institutions and diversity of its economy. The Cornell land-grant colleges have sought to adapt their programs and resources to meet contemporary needs. Some critics today contend the colleges have moved too far afield from serving their original intent.

In addition to teaching, the mission of the land-grant colleges at Cornell has been focused on public service and research. The Cooperative Extension Service has played a vital role in making technical knowledge and management expertise available to rural communities through a network of county extension offices. Over the years both providers and users have been conscious of the need to be in tune with a rapidly changing world. County agents continue to

serve as an energetic conduit of information between Cornell's research efforts and rural communities.

The Cornell research arm was designed to encourage innovation in agricultural and rural development. At the time of the Morrill Act's passage, the nation was earnestly promoting exploitation of its rural resources. Currently, the range of research efforts and extension activities has broadened considerably from those early beginnings -- evidence that the institution has changed with the times. Topics now addressed fall into such areas as local government, housing, small animal veterinary practice, water resource management, and land-resource planning. Indeed, state lawmakers recently designated and funded Cornell as a high-tech development center in the bio-technology research areas.

Extension agents now are as likely to spend a day working with a new second-home owner planning the best use of a woodlot as they are with the dairy farmer next door. Some agents have found themselves literally surrounded by metropolitan concerns in such areas as Albany or Monroe Counties.

The School of Environmental Science and Forestry at Syracuse University is a statutory college that was mandated in 1911. Like Cornell, it resides within and is governed and funded through the State University system. Its original mission was to serve the educational and research needs of the forestry industry in New York State, in spite of its location in a large metropolitan area. The College extended its program into several areas of environmental science, initially through offerings in the Department of Landscape Architecture. It now confers its own degrees in this area, continuing efforts to adapt its programs to changing times. Unfortunately, Syracuse has not had the diversity of opportunities that Cornell has had for close association with, and service to, members of the rural community through a statewide extension service.

The College of Ceramics located at Alfred University in Alfred, New York, also is a statutory college under the governance of State University. It has

played a significant role in advancing technology and educational preparation associated with this important industry. Nearby, the Corning Glass Center in Corning, New York serves as a practical laboratory for instruction, research, and development.

The State University Health Science Centers at Syracuse, Buffalo University, and the clinical campus at SUNY Binghamton represent potential strengths for rural New York in the provision of research and training for rural health care. Each is located in a large city and is less accessible to most rural students and practitioners than to urban. Still, arrangements are possible that will accomodate the special requirements of health care personnel and institutions in rural New York.

As we assess the rich diversity of university resources that are either already committed to or have the potential for a significant, positive impact on rural New York's development, such names as Clarkson College of Technology, Rensselaer Polytechnic, St. Lawrence, and SUNY Albany also stand out. R.P.I., for instance, was recently funded by the state to establish a high-tech research and development center in the computer/information field. Similarly, the newly formed Rockefeller College of Public Affairs and Policy at SUNY Albany should be of assistance in stimulating research and development efforts in local government.

Colleges

Since they opened at the turn of the century the dominant institutions in educating the majority of rural New York's educators have been the public teachers' colleges. Originally, these included the 12 "normal schools" (now Arts and Science Colleges offering baccalaureate and master's degrees). State lawmakers established the state normal schools in order to train a cadre of qualified public school teachers to match the needs of a growning, increasingly diversified economy and population. All but four of these institutions is

located in one of the state's rural counties. Also at about that time State lawmakers created additional opportunities for post-secondary education in domestic science and agricultural pursuits through opening the six Agricultural and Technical Colleges. All but one of these institutions is located in a rural county. They became the dominant force for training rural New York's technicians, supervisors, and managers in selected fields. All normal schools and agricultural schools came under the control of the State University of New York when it was established in 1948.

The formation of the State University also provided the occasion to establish four university "centers" with extended capabilities in doctoral education and research (Albany, Stony Brook, Binghamton, Buffalo). Soon after, the mission of the normal schools was extended to include liberal arts and sciences. The agricultural schools became agricultural colleges.

Responsibility for preparation of students for technical occupations was not assigned to the Agricultural and Technical Colleges until the late 1930's. The nation, still mired in the great depression, feared that machines would replace people--further compounding the critical unemployment situation. The word "technocracy" was found repugnant to many. Our Agricultural and Technical Colleges had to struggle hard to convert themselves from schools preparing farmers and homemakers to colleges that prepared technicians in support of agriculture, business, engineering, health care, and public service career fields.

The public community college concept was first introduced to New York State in 1950 when Jamestown Community was opened in Jamestown, New York. Originally, the community college program was focused on liberal arts transfer programs for local students wishing to continue their studies at a baccalaureate college. The community college evening program was an innovation that quickly proved very attractive to the part-time adult student seeking convenient, affordable higher education on a part-time basis. The community colleges came under the

umbrella of the State University. Unlike other State University Colleges, however, which are state-operated institutions, the community college is an agency of local government.

When the community college system was fully implemented, it was possible for 85 percent of New York citizens to commute to nearby public institutions for technical or preprofessional preparation. Over a span of approximately 20 years, 38 community colleges were established--20 in the state's rural counties and 18 in urban counties.

Each category of State University institutions broadened its curricula offerings in order to meet contemporary societal needs and to create a broad avenue of educational opportunities within reach of an exploding baby boom generation. A completely new residential campus was built for each under the leadership of Governor Rockefeller and the State Legislature in order to match institutional capabilities with broadened missions and responsibilities.

With the passage of time, it has become increasingly difficult to distinguish between the academic offerings and clientele of the Agricultural and Technical College and the community college. Indeed, some overlap has crept in between these institutions and other university colleges. Serious questions should be raised in this current era with respect to any institutions whose programs and missions duplicate one another needlessly.

The record shows that in the mid-60s legislation was introduced unsuccessfully which would have permitted the Agricultural and Technical colleges to be converted to local community colleges. When this attempt failed, the presidents of these institutions advocated converting selected Agricultural and Technical Colleges to upper-division technical institutions that would offer the baccalaureate opportunity to the growing number of community and technical college students who sought to prepare themselves for the increasingly sophisticated technological employment market of the 1970s and 80s. Instead, the State Univer-

sity opened a new College of Technology at Utica/Rome in 1969 with its promise to serve the upper division needs of technology graduates from New York State's public two-year colleges.

Currently, State University is grappling with the problem of awarding baccalaureate degrees in selected technical disciplines offered by the Agricultural and Technical Colleges at Alfred, Cobleskill, and Farmingdale. There are many extremely complex public policy issues to be resolved before we can achieve a college system in rural New York that will best meet the requirements of a new era into which the state is rapidly being driven.

Public Secondary Schools in Rural Areas

In the early 1900's rural New York's elementary and secondary education program was offered in 10,000 one-room and union free schools. Since then, through elimination and consolidation, this number has been reduced to 327 rural central school districts. The purpose behind consolidation was to advance educational standards, quality, and cost-effectiveness.

The public school system has traditionally been a source of pride and focus for life in the rural community. The secondary school often serves as a community adult education, social, and recreational center. This distinctive role now is increasingly shared with BOCES and nearby colleges. Rural communities are now struggling to maintain quality school systems at a cost that is affordable to local taxpayers.

In recent history, the primary emphasis of the rural secondary school has been to prepare college-bound youths, in contrast to earlier times when the major thrust was vocational preparation. The shift in emphasis to college preparation evolved in direct response to the needs of the great majority of students in the 60s and 70s who sought to prepare themselves for new occupations that required a level of educational preparation beyond high school. In addition, access to affordable post-secondary educational opportunity was put within reach

of the great majority of high school graduates through expansion of the State University and community college systems, and private institutions.

A recent report prepared for the Rural Schools Program at Cornell University, identifies several important problems that New York's rural schools now are facing. (The Condition of Rural Education in New York State. David Monk, 1983):

- Personal wealth has been increasing in the small or sparse rural districts at a slower rate than that found in the large or dense urban districts.
- Small or sparse rural districts are increasing the fraction of their local income spent on education. Large or dense urban districts are reducing the fraction of their local income spent on education.
- While small or sparse rural districts lost an average of ten percent of enrollment between 1978 and 1982, the analogous figure for the large or dense urban districts was 15 percent.
- There remains a tendency for a larger percentage of students in the smallest or most sparsely settled rural districts to score below the minimum level of competency as measured by the state-administered PEP test.
- Regardless of their size or sparsity, payable operating aid is making up a smaller fraction of school districts' approved educational expenditures.
- Mathematics, English, and foreign language teachers are less well trained and less experienced in small compared to large districts. This is not the case for science teachers.
- There is a greater incidence of first year teachers in small districts compared to large districts.
- Teachers in small districts are more likely to teach outside their area of certification than is the case in large districts.
- Opportunities to study advanced courses are virtually non-existent in the small districts. (e.g. The number of micro-computers per student in rural districts is appallingly low.)

Judging from the Cornell data, the condition of schools in New York's rural communities is lower and declining compared to urban systems. Also, the tax burden on local communities is increasing as a share of income. Clearly, equal opportunity is not being provided to all students in the state. Monk proposes that a judicious combination of policies be designed for rural areas in order

to promote district consolidation, provide additional state aid to necessarily small districts, and facilitate the sharing of regular academic programs.

Boards of Cooperative Educational Services

Boards of Cooperative Educational Services (BOCES) were authorized by legislation enacted in 1948 in order to improve educational opportunity for elementary and secondary students in rural areas of New York. The idea was to coordinate and provide shared services that a single school district could not afford to offer on its own. The BOCES provide program and administrative services on a cooperative basis to local school districts that request this assistance. Originally, a limited number of services were offered.

Over the last three decades, BOCES have evolved into agencies that serve urban as well as rural areas through the provision of occupational education, continuing education for adults, staff and curriculum development, special education, educational communications, itinerant teacher services, and assistance in instructional and administrative computer applications. Today, there are 43 BOCES in New York State serving 708 local school districts.

Before BOCES, vocational education was offered by the public secondary institutions in their home schools. Vocational education in the secondary schools has its roots in the Smith-Hughes Act passed by Congress in 1917. This legislation allowed states to offer vocational education in their high schools. Previously, one learned a craft as a helper or an apprentice to a journeyman--usually arranged by a labor union.

In rural New York, vocational education was not taken seriously until union free districts were centralized to increase school size. Most rural districts confined their vocational education to agriculture and home economics. Little effort was made to include distributive or trade and industrial education. A wide spectrum of vocational programs, fortified with regular curriculum requirements, first became available with BOCES.

Vocational education is the largest single BOCES program, followed closely by special education for the disadvantaged. Currently there are over 100 different occupational courses offered in 72 area centers, although no one center offers a full menu of courses. BOCES units also offer extensive adult education activities designed to retrain individuals or upgrade their skills. Industries also contract with BOCES to train or retrain their industrial workers. Companies provide release time to employees needing additional skills. BOCES instructors often conduct in-plant training when facilities are provided by the employer.

Currently, BOCES is in many respects a microcosm of the many challenges and opportunities that are being thrust upon rural education today as institutions and communities seek to redefine old assumptions and patterns. Many of the problems and issues facing rural policy makers, such as declining enrollment, fiscal squeezes, relevance, equity, conflicting missions or duplication of efforts, are common to all. Some are dilemmas that will never go away. A few demand serious study and resolution.

One of the greatest challenges to education in all rural institutions is the declining enrollment of traditional students. Many BOCES, for instance, are in an era of fiscal constraints and declining enrollment associated with tightening local school budgets. As their own student enrollments drop cooperating central schools are less able/willing than previously to fund all of the students who might profit from BOCES programs.

Because each BOCES usually is funded by cooperating school districts on a per student basis, declining enrollments add up to higher per capita costs than previously. Moreover, increased state aid to local schools for BOCES instruction has lagged seriously behind inflation and salary costs. The result is increased program cutbacks and fewer educational opportunities in rural areas--a situation that threatens to spiral downward in future years.

A recent report by the State Education Department's Office of Occupational and Continuing Education (Occupational Education in BOCES; October, 1982) reviewed the history and future of BOCES occupational programs. The report recognized the vital role BOCES has played in the economic development of New York State in easing its transfer from an agrarian to industrial state in the 1950s, in expanding secondary vocational education opportunities to baby boom teenagers in the 1960s, and in the 70s, also making education available to adults and out-of-school youth.

But the report raises several serious questions about the role of BOCES in the new economic, technological, and demographic context of the 1980s and beyond, and about its financing, regulatory, and governance mechanisms. The report suggests that BOCES vocational programs have responded well to work force requirements in recent decades, but have not kept pace with current and future needs.

Questions are raised about the appropriateness of BOCES vocational programs. It is not clear that they should continue to offer advanced vocational skills training to secondary school youth when future success may rest instead on a versatile and literate work force with solid mathematical writing, and communications skills, as well as computer literacy. The importance of a core curriculum is increasingly recognized.

Business and industry representatives have indicated that broad-based, transferrable skills will best impart the flexibility required. In those areas where advanced vocational skills training will meet future societal needs, critics have not always agreed that secondary students are able to make mature career choices, or that it is even desirable today to prepare a 16 to 18-year-old student to be a competent craftsperson at that stage in life before basic functional skills have been honed to acceptable competency.

Criticism also has been leveled at the education tradeoffs that are required in providing vocational education for rural students and at the associated high

transportation costs imposed on local school districts and state aid to localities. Secondary students in most rural vocational programs currently split their days between home schools where they get the 3-Rs and separate BOCES training centers. This schedule may involve a considerable, and occasionally excessive, amount of travel time in a school bus, particularly for those students residing in sparsely settled rural areas.

Other critics of the status quo contend that there is duplication of effort between BOCES vocational training and certain post-secondary programs. Some advocate responsibility for vocational education should be shifted from the local school district to post-secondary institutions that can better afford and are equipped to offer these costly specialized programs. Moreover, they argue, the cost will be partly born by the student who benefits directly as well as the broader society, instead of already strapped local school systems.

The Regents Regional Coordinating and Planning Boards for Vocational Education have attempted to allocate responsibilities to the most appropriate institutions, but the need for additional clarification is widely recognized. Cooperation between the public two-year colleges and BOCES, for example, in the use of facilities for vocational/technical education has occurred to some extent, but there is a great deal of unrealized potential.

FUTURE TRENDS IN RURAL EDUCATION

Obvious risks are associated with any effort to assess the impact of new challenges and to suggest where creative action is required in order to advance the greater good of all. Yet several current trends are likely to persist, affecting rural education for at least the next decade. Perhaps the most pervasive in its effect is the declining enrollment of traditional students, which all projections indicate will continue downward for several years in most educational institutions. According to the New York State Department of Educa-

tion, enrollment in public schools throughout the state will continue to decline by about 100,000 students each year until 1984-85, when the annual decline will drop to 25,000. In the decade ending 1988-89, the number of K-12 public school students will have dropped nearly 40 percent. Similarly, enrollment of traditional students in higher education institutions is projected to decline.

Declining enrollment is part of the larger change in population structure occurring as members of the baby boom generation enter middle age. These declines will be partly balanced by migration to rural areas and by adult students, but it is important to recall that not all households moving to rural areas have school-age children, and not all rural areas are experiencing significant population growth. Of those that are growing, many are swelled by retired people or second-home owners.

The degree to which nonparents, particularly those with limited financial resources, will be willing to subsidize educational programs is not clear. We face an increasing incidence nationally of citizen-backed referenda to limit state and local taxes. What is clear is that inflation, fixed costs, shrinking federal support, and tight state budgets leave little room to spare. Fiscal strain at the state and local level plus increased competition for funds means hard choices will need to be made within and between social service programs, including education.

The declines in enrollment will result in growing excess capacity in the educational system at all levels. Areas and agencies that are unable to maintain their clientele face surplus facilities, more limited resources, and, in the case of public secondary education, decreased public interest in the school system. School closures commonly result, although in many instances these are and will be preceeded by the collapse of programs other than those essential to accreditation or mission. It is reasonable to expect that the current emphasis on equity in educational opportunity will only become keener as cutbacks widen the gap between

"haves" and "have nots" in our state's educational system.

School closures feed into a longstanding national trend of consolidation of local secondary educational facilities, which was encouraged in efforts to rationalize and improve the system. Financial pressures will continue to force consolidation, in spite of emerging societal preferences for smaller, decentralized institutions. Advocates of decentralization argue that consolidation has weakened the traditional tie between rural education and community life, diminished involvement of rural parents in local schools, and encouraged outmigration of rural children.

As the traditional clientele of educational institutions shrinks, pressure to find new student markets, programs, and delivery systems grows. At a time when our economy is shifting gear, this search is likely to result in greater accommodation of educational institutions to changing needs of many rural employers and employees. The current heightened interaction between businesses and vocational training programs in program design for secondary and adult education programs and in worker retraining programs is likely to be greatly expanded in the near future. The awareness of New York's increasing interdependence with the world economy and of the implications this has for education in the state will only heighten.

ISSUES FOR POLICY MAKERS

The principal focus of rural policy makers in New York should be the provision of responsive and equitable educational opportunities in rural New York that are in step with the times. Throughout this paper I have discussed strengths and weaknesses within the structure of secondary, post-secondary, and university level education in rural New York. Several avenues for discussion of problems and opportunities relating to education in rural New York have been suggested. Three central and highly interrelated policy issues are critical to this

discussion. They include: institutional mission, governance and management, and financing, although the most fundamental and pervasive of these issues is the current increased confusion surrounding the missions, goals, and priorities of our publicly supported and controlled rural educational institutions.

We should continue to ask ourselves the following broad questions:

- Are our missions, goals, and priorities valid in terms of the current and projected requirements of society?
- Are there more cost-effective alternatives or underexploited means of providing services?
- Is there unwarranted redundancy within the overall structure of rural education providers? In clienteles served? In programs? In administration?

At the same time we should address the following specific issues:

- Tremendous capabilities exist within our institutions. How can the full potentials of these be tapped in responding to the state's rural development requirements? Are additional inputs required in order to respond to projected challenges and opportunities?
- Historically, graduates of land-grant and statutory colleges have returned to rural communities to serve in the development of that community and its economy. Does this relationship still exist? If not, should it? If so, how may it be enhanced?
- Some critics feel the rural colleges within the SUNY governance structure are seriously hampered in their efforts to remain contemporary. Is this a serious problem? If so, what factors most seriously hinder institutional responsiveness, creativity, and initiative?
- What is the source of our funding problems in our secondary, post-secondary, and university level institutions in rural New York? Are they endemic to rural areas or just to rural institutions?
- There appears to be needless redundancy and inefficiency within our vocational and technical education program structure and clientele. How should overlaps between institutions be reconciled?
- Is it desirable to offer vocational and technical training to students before they have mastered basic competencies in math, science, communications, and computer literacy? Do we risk certifying adults unable to adapt to a changing society?
- It has been suggested that funding and programming for the disadvantaged students has been given a disproportionate share of secondary (and now post-secondary) effort. Should additional

attention be given to talented and gifted students?

- Do state and federal mandated programs and procedures create undue hardship for rural elementary and secondary schools? If so, where? In what instances would local autonomy be preferrable?

In sum, New York's rural education institutions offer a wealth and diversity of opportunities crucial to the state. Yet the real potentials of these institutions are untapped.

In closing, I would like to say that this paper is based on a lifetime of love for and association with rural New York. It is my hope that it will have served to stimulate thinking and action in this vital and ever-critical area.